USAID | AFGHANISTAN

FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY SPECIAL REPORT

MARCH 8, 2006



Photo: USAID/AINP



Photo: USAID/AINP

Women in Nangarhar receive training in embroidery and making handicrafts as part of a program responding to an immediate need for income. Over 3,750 women have benefited from household income generating activities in Nangarhar province as a substitute for poppy cultivation through USAID's Alternative Livelihoods Program.

FUNDING FOR WOMEN'S PROGRAMS IN AFGHANISTAN

Of the $802,800,000 total amount USAID requested for 2007, $76,405,000 will directly benefit women and girls, including:

- $23.2 million for health programs
- $20.7 million for education programs
- $5 million for women led NGOs
- $2 million for entrepreneurship
- $10.1 million for alternative livelihoods

Since 2002, USAID is empowering Afghan women and improving their well-being. We've increased access to better quality healthcare, provided greater educational opportunities, and trained parliamentarians to be more effective advocates for their constituents. By offering urban and rural women the training and resources, we promote economic advancement. This report highlights progress made by Afghan women in honor of International Women's Day.

INVESTING IN WOMEN

Afghanistan's economy was devastated by nearly a quarter century of warfare and many widows became the sole providers for their families. USAID helps Afghan women by providing small loans for new businesses and entrepreneurial training. Of the 28,000 loans that the U.S. Government provided to support small businesses, 75 percent went to women.

Income generation projects for women directly benefit communities by fulfilling an immediate need for income. This alternative to poppy cultivation serves vulnerable populations. In Nangarhar, approximately 3,000 women in 85 villages received training in bee-keeping, poultry farming, kitchen gardens, and home-based dairy production. Such projects contribute to good farming practices and livestock care. They boost the local economy and provide food to communities. Also in Nangarhar, women's handicraft programs enable women to create high quality textiles for export and local markets.

This year a handicrafts' marketing and training center will be launched with assistance from the Afghan Women's Business Federation (AWBF). The federation, which was founded last October, unites 13 women's organizations nationwide. This network helps women secure financing, improve their products and organizations, and connects them to markets. With chapters in rural villages and provinces nationwide, this federation gives women a greater voice in shaping policies that affect them and provides them with the ability to leverage their resources.

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TRAINING WOMEN FOR GLOBAL AND LOCAL MARKETS

Women who were forbidden to study or work under the Taliban lacked practical skills. A variety of training programs, from basic literacy to higher education and vocational training, address these shortfalls. In November 2003, USAID funded the American University of Afghanistan to address critical shortages of highly skilled citizens. The university offers English-language programs and a market-oriented curriculum to aid in Afghanistan's re-entry to global markets. Scholarships offer women and those with financial needs an opportunity to attend. To further encourage women to seek advanced degrees, USAID constructed a dormitory on the campus of Kabul University to accommodate 1,100 young women attending four institutions in Kabul. The Ministry of Higher Education is continuing to attract students through a nationwide outreach campaign to encourage women to take advantage of opportunities to earn a higher education.

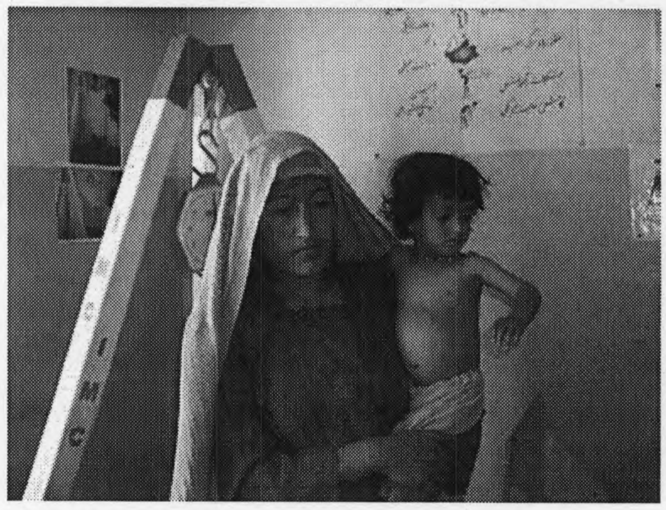


Photo: USAID/Afghanistan

A mother and child visit a local health clinic. Approximately 340,000 Afghans receive medical treatment monthly in our clinics. USAID health officials Jim Sarn and Jim Griffith recently received the highest civilian award by the king for their work improving healthcare in Afghanistan.

Last March, the U.S.-Afghan Women's Council brought $100,000 worth of modern computers to Afghanistan donated by Dell, Inc. Women judges received information technology training. Through the help of the Ministry of Women's Affairs and USAID, Afghan women created an IT Alliance. The goal is to use internet technology to help link women to vital information for their professional growth and expand business opportunities.



Photo: USAID/Afghanistan

Afghan girls show off a poster about good nutrition and safe water as part of a public outreach campaign to improve health. Over 7 million people in 14 provinces now have better access to quality health services due to USAID and Ministry of Public Health efforts. Approximately 70% of patients served are women and children.

Despite these efforts, more than 90 percent of Afghan women living in rural areas are illiterate. USAID addresses rural women's needs by teaching them literacy, numeracy, and life skills. Women participate in self-help savings groups, enterprise and market development, and decision-making with elected Community Development Councils. This innovative approach makes literacy purposeful and motivates students while enabling them to be more self-sufficient and productive. This program was highlighted as an example of "best practices" at Cairo's opening plenary at the Broader Middle East and North Africa (BMENA) region's "Achieving Literacy for All" conference in September 2005. In one year, this program reached 9,600 students of which 4,800 were girls and women aged 10-40. Learners at 384 learning centers in 192 villages of five rural provinces participate in the program. A similar literacy program focusing on good health and hygiene was also recognized as a model for its "best practices" at the conference. This program helps its 8,700 participants get training as community healthcare workers or midwives in areas where the absence of trained female health providers contributes to staggering mortality rates.

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SAVING LIVES AND IMPROVING WOMEN'S HEALTH

Afghanistan has one of the highest maternal mortality rates in the world. Therefore improving women's health is critical to the development of women and Afghan society overall. USAID provided $67 million to a program to expand community health care to four million women in 14 provinces to improve maternal and child health. Of the 3,100 female community health workers trained under the program, over half serve in local communities. This program empowers women to serve on community health councils. Leadership training for 400 council members generates support for health initiatives and promotes healthy behavior. Women comprise over half of the 1,700 doctors, midwives, and nurses who received refresher training in areas such as family planning, integrated management of childhood illness, newborn care, and infectious diseases. The program also trains health providers to care for female patients emphasizing their right to quality care, participation in family planning, and focus on nutrition especially during adolescence and pregnancy.

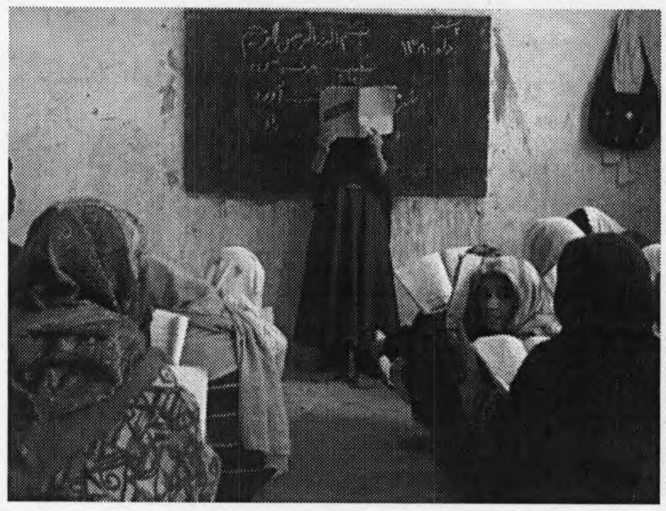


Photo:WFP/Alejandro Chicheri

Girls who were denied an education under the Taliban are returning to school. Almost 170,000 students enrolled in accelerated learning programs to catch up on their education.

Only eight percent of births in Afghanistan are attended by trained health providers. In 2003, Afghanistan had only 500 midwives. Over $6.2 million in grants are dedicated to expanding the number of hospital and community midwives. Through a midwifery training program offered by the Institute of Health Sciences with USAID assistance, 337 midwives have graduated from this institute's four campuses and 830 more are expected to graduate by 2006. On March 8th, 30 midwives will graduate in Khost.



Photo: USAID/Afghanistan

More than 90% Afghan women living in rural areas are illiterate. USAID trained teachers, taught functional literacy, and constructed schools to support education for all Afghans.

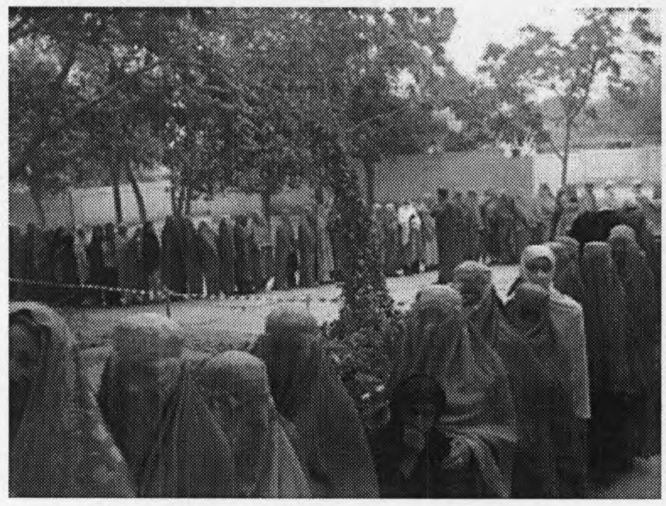
IMPROVING EDUCATION NATIONWIDE

USAID's new teacher education program led by ministry officials and donors is raising education standards and training the nation's 110,000 teachers beginning in early 2006. This builds on an earlier public-private partnership between the Government of Afghanistan, supported by the First Lady of the United States, and the U.S. Afghan Women's Council, which established the Women's Teacher Training Institute in Kabul in September 2004. The programs provide women in mainly rural areas with training, materials, and other resources to increase literacy and train teachers. The Institute has trained approximately 384 village-based literacy teachers who are supported by 16 lead trainers and materials developers. Plans are envisioned to develop a national literacy resource center.

> **IMPROVING HEALTH**
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> As of January 2006, USAID trained more than 2,700 male and 2,800 female community health workers.
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> On March 8, roughly 30 midwives will graduate in Khost. By July 2006, over 800 midwives will graduate from the Afghan Institute of Health Services through USAID assistance.

To provide additional resources for education and contribute to greater literacy, USAID has printed and distributed 48 million textbooks since 2002 and is partnering with the Danish development agency DANIDA to print and distribute an additional 17 million, replacing the curriculum of the mujahiddin in the early 1990s. In

addition, USAID completed construction or refurbishment of 477 schools nationwide with another 251 in progress. Some of these schools that educate girls and boys have recently been targeted by extremists who oppose the integration and empowerment of girls in Afghanistan. They seek to intimidate those who advance girls' education, which was outlawed under the Taliban until just a few years ago.


Photo: USAID/Afghanistan

Of the 6.8 million Afghans who voted in the September 2005 elections, 43% were women. Women are leading as part of the Constitutional Jirga, parliament, cabinet, councils, and courts.

As a result of that ban, many Afghan students entered school at a primary grade level, regardless of age. USAID responded by initiating an accelerated learning strategy to allow students to catch up on grades missed during years of conflict. The students, of which 58 percent are girls, complete two years of government curriculum in just one year. This intensified coursework maximizes class time and educated 170,000 students across 17 provinces. It also keeps students engaged reducing student drop outs.

In another effort to boost education, last September the International School of Kabul opened. The school aims to provide a U.S. diploma with at least 90 percent of graduates meeting college-prep standards. The school serves poor Afghans and others who returned from abroad or seek an internationally recognized education. It also educates children of international aid workers and businesspeople. Roughly 190 students enrolled in grades K-11, of which 39 percent are girls and 63 percent are Afghan students. The 12th grade will be added this year.

STRENGTHENING DEMOCRACY AND GOVERNANCE

Afghan women have taken major steps since 2001. They held leadership positions in the Constitutional Loya Jirga, a female candidate ran for president, and thousands of women voted in the 2004 presidential elections and the 2005 parliamentary elections. USAID supported reforms in democracy and governance by registering voters, educating Afghan voters and citizens through civil society programs in 29 of 34 provinces, and assisting in the logistics and security when an estimated 6.84 million Afghans cast their votes in the historic parliamentary elections of September 2005 when 68 women won seats.

Fifteen new women's resource centers now offer outreach and training for women in rural provinces to continue boosting women's social, economic, and democratic advancement. The Ministry of Women's Affairs and USAID develop civil society organizations to advocate for women. USAID is providing $2.5 million to support the Ministry of Women's Affairs efforts to improve the lives of Afghan women by strengthening advocacy, policy making, and activities through outreach to provinces nationwide.

EXPANDING BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION AND NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

Under the recently approved program to conserve biodiversity and use natural resources wisely, women will take part and benefit from access to opportunities to benefit from local advocacy activities and reforestation through seed collection, cleaning, sorting, and storage.

Currently women receive training in gardening, agro-forestry and forestry techniques, and conservation of diverse plant life while beautifying public spaces through the USAID-funded conservation program. This program trains women and provides a source of income for their families. It increases awareness about sustainability, protects the environment, and informally influences children within the household. Like many USAID programs that impact women, communities also benefit.